

to find on the enclosing wall. By good fortune there emerged some short inscriptions painted in Kharoshthi script and Indian language by the side of the two figures of the upper frieze first laid bare. What better proof could I have wished in support of the conclusion to which my previous finds had already led me, that these temples and frescoes dated back to the time when the sites of Niya and Lop-nor still flourished? But even thus I was little prepared for the sight which the frescoed wall remnants presented when at the end of two days of hard digging, in an icy gale and whirling dust clouds, I could proceed to the clearing and closer examination of the paintings.

On the west side a segment of the circular wall, once probably containing a second entrance, had been levelled right down to the floor by early treasure-seekers; and owing to this destruction the frescoes were found now extending over two detached hemicycles broken at either end. The wall decoration in the one to the north had for some reason suffered so badly that of an upper frieze nothing could be made out but half-effaced groups of small figures. But in the frescoed dado below, which reached to a height of about three feet from the floor, it was easy, in spite of faded colours and plentiful cracks of the plaster, to recognize a remarkably graceful composition almost classical in design and details. Its connecting feature was a broad festoon of wreaths and flowers which youthful supporters carried on their shoulders with the ease and abandon of true Putti. Among them wingless Erotes alternated with young figures wearing the Phrygian cap and of a type which, in spite of a certain girlish cast of face, unmistakably recalled the Mithras worshipped throughout the Roman empire.

But more remarkable still were the portraits which filled in succession the hollows of the undulating festoon. In each of them there rose the head and bust of a man or girl, presented in classical outlines and yet with a freedom of individual expression which made the effect most striking. The types of men's heads differed. Some were quite Roman in look, others with their peculiar cut of hair